

is—are terrorist activities, and that’s what you’re seeing taking place.

Thank you all.

Chancellor Merkel. Thank you.

NOTE: The President’s news conference began at 12:34 p.m. in the Town Hall. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia; President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority; Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier captured and held

captive by militants in Gaza since June 25; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, Israeli soldiers captured and held captive by militants in Lebanon since July 12; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria. A reporter referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Philippe Douste-Blazy of France. Chancellor Merkel spoke in German, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks in a Discussion With Civic Leaders in St. Petersburg, Russia *July 14, 2006*

Ambassador, thank you for setting up this meeting. I’ve just had a really interesting meeting. I’ve been meeting with young, vibrant Russian activists who, first, love their country; secondly, care deeply about the form of government of the country; and third, care deeply about the human condition in their country.

These folks come from a variety of different NGOs and civic groups, representing a variety of issues, all bound together to be involved in their governments, in their countries, so that it’s the best it can possibly be.

I spent a lot of time listening to their concerns. I assured them that the United States of America cares about the form of government in Russia, that we believe in the universal values embedded in democracy. We believe in rule of law; we believe in human rights; we believe everybody has a right to be treated equally.

I explained to them that our own Government and our country took a while to evolve, but nevertheless, it’s important to be aiming toward a better tomorrow.

I hope my visit here was encouraging to them; it certainly was instructional for me. I explained to them my strategy of dealing with Vladimir Putin, who is my friend. Some asked me to deliver messages,

which I’d be more than happy to do. I explained to them that it’s in the U.S. interests to remain engaged with Russia—Russia is a great country with a fantastic future—and that the foreign policy of my administration will be to work with Russia to solve common problems and, at the same time, be in a position where we can have a frank exchange of ideas and philosophies and views.

I told the young leaders here that this has been a very enriching experience for me. I shared the thought—shared the idea that I’m the father of 24-year-old twin daughters. I’m looking at some folks here at the table who are their age; I’m impressed by their courage and their idealism and their desire to make their societies a better place.

So I want to thank you all for your visit. Thank you for your frank exchanges. I will you all the very best, and I ask for God’s blessings on the people of Russia.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:06 p.m. at the Counsel General’s residence. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Russia William J. Burns; and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement Honoring Former President Gerald Ford's Birthday July 14, 2006

President Gerald Ford's story is a true American story. It is the tale of a son of the Midwest who achieved great things through hard work, dedication, courage, and humility. President Ford played football at Michigan, received a law degree from Yale, served in the Navy during World War II, and for decades he represented western Michigan as a Republican Congressman from Grand Rapids.

Then came his appointment with history. He assumed the Presidency at a perilous moment for our country. A President had resigned; the United States was involved in a cold war; the economy was sputtering;

and America's confidence was deeply shaken.

Few leaders have ever faced such challenges upon taking office. Yet President Ford met them with steadfastness and courage. His leadership helped heal a wounded nation.

Since leaving office, President Ford has set a high standard for grace and character. He has never forgotten his roots or lost sight of the things that matter, including his deep love for his wife and partner, Betty.

Laura and I join all Americans in wishing President Ford a happy birthday.

The President's News Conference With President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in Strelna, Russia July 15, 2006

President Putin. Dear ladies and gentlemen, I have just completed my meeting with the President of the United States. The Russian party is satisfied with the results of this meeting. The meeting has reaffirmed that Russia and the United States remain reliable and mutually interested partners. We have been able to reach a whole range of agreements on key issues on the bilateral and international agenda.

We have adopted a joint statement, the basis of which are our parallel initiatives on the secure development of nuclear energy. Its main goal is to contribute to the sustainability and reliability of the supply of this type of energy resource and the parallel reduction of the threat of the spread of nuclear weapons. We believe that this will be possible in the case of the creation of a system of international enrichment centers integrated into a single net-

work and, of course, under strict control on the part of the IAEA.

It is equally important to pay a close attention to the development of innovative technology in the creation of new-generation reactors. The most productive way to go is to carry out this work on the basis of broad international cooperation. Such an approach will have a positive and stabilizing effect on the progress of international political and economic processes.

We have also supported the United States proposal on the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership. The Russian initiative on the creation of multilateral centers for the provision of nuclear fuel cycle services and the idea of a global partnership in this area complement each other very well, and we'll jointly work towards integrating these two initiatives. In order to achieve this, we'll have to resolve problems that have to do